

US-131 Improvement Study
Project Newsletter – Stakeholders’ Meeting Notes, Questions & Comments
November 2003

In an effort to solicit public input and to keep everyone informed of key issues, this newsletter is being circulated to the US-131 Improvement Study Stakeholders’ Committee.

In this issue:

Notes from the recent stakeholders meeting including questions, answers, comments, and concerns.

Stakeholders’ Meeting, November 18, 2003.

A stakeholders’ meeting for the *US-131 Stakeholders’ Committee* was held on November 18th, 2003 at the City of Three Rivers Community Center. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce *Conceptual Alternative PA-5*, give an update of the current project status, and gather comments and input from the stakeholders. Representatives from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Consoer Townsend Envirodyne Engineers (CTE), and Wilbur Smith Associates (WSA) gave a presentation regarding the project.

MDOT introduced an additional alternative (PA-5), which provides a feasible non-freeway option to alternatives PA-1 through PA-4. The consulting team presented a conceptual overview of PA-5 and summarized the existing PA-1 through PA-4 and related access management efforts for the corridor. (Attached is a map showing the concept for each alternative). Access management is an integral part of PA-5 and uses a variety of proven engineering techniques to improve roadway operational efficiency.

MDOT explained that the proposed PA-5 will be examined under the mandate of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) in the same manner as PA-1 through PA-4. NEPA requires government agencies to consider a full range of alternatives, the potential environmental consequences of the alternatives, document their analysis, and make this information available to the public for comment prior to implementation. In addition to evaluating the potential environmental effects, MDOT will also take into account the transportation needs of the public in reaching a decision that is in the best overall public interest.

MDOT is relying on the stakeholders to inform their constituents of these additions. MDOT is expecting to formally present the new alternative at a public informational meeting in March. The more informed the public is prior to the meeting will help focus the discussions.

Schedule

Below is a brief overview of upcoming milestones.

- Complete studies and technical memoranda - Winter ‘04
- Submit Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to FHWA - Summer ‘04
- Conduct public hearing - Late Summer ‘04
- Determine recommended alternative - Winter ‘05
- Submit Final EIS to Federal Highway Administration FHWA - Summer ‘05
- Obtain Record of Decision – Late Summer ‘05

A stakeholders’ comments and question and answer period was conducted. After the stakeholders’ meeting was adjourned, general public questions and concerns were addressed in a workshop format. Attendees were able to view several aerial exhibits of the project area depicting PA-1 through PA-4 and conceptual alternative PA-5.

Questions and concerns from stakeholders are summarized below.

Frequently Asked Questions and Responses:

These questions and answers are representative of those from the November 18 stakeholders’ meeting.

Q: In evaluating the new Conceptual Alternative (PA-5), were non-motorized facilities & pedestrian safety considered?
A: ***We are currently at the conceptual stages. As the alternative evolves, MDOT will actively seek to address pedestrian safety through appropriate roadway and intersection design standards. Likewise, the feasibility of non-motorized facilities will be evaluated and incorporated where needed and feasible.***

Q: Why was PA-5 developed?
A: ***In order to fully explore a range of options as required by NEPA, the non-freeway alternative is being evaluated. PA-5 provides a feasible non-freeway option that is different from all present alternatives.***

Q: Did the Steering Committee consider providing a grade separation at the railroad crossing south of White Pigeon?
A: ***Several options were considered in the process of developing PA-5. These options included grade separations at various locations including the railroad tracks south of US-12. However, it was determined that the effect on operations and delay did not warrant the additional cost and right-of-way.***

Q: What is the estimated construction cost of PA-1 through PA-4 and conceptual alternative PA-5?
A: ***The following chart summarizes the estimated cost for each alternative.***

	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	PA-5 (Estimated)
Cost (Millions of 2001 Dollars)	\$248	\$434	\$259	\$276	<\$200

Q: What is the next step in the study and how does it relate to the economic development of the area and region.
A: ***The next step is to finalize PA-5. Once PA-5 is finalized, social, economic and environmental (SEE) studies will begin to evaluate the impacts of PA-5 in detail. Cumulative economic impacts within the US-131 corridor will be evaluated.***

Q: Will the Access Management Study include the Village of Schoolcraft.
A: ***Yes! The US-131 Access Management Study will include US-131 at the Village of Schoolcraft. However the overall study of US-131 does not.***

Q: If PA-5 is selected as the preferred alternative will MDOT purchase enough right-of-way for a future 4-lane section?
A: ***It is too early in the process to determine the number of lanes needed. Adequate right-of-way will be purchased to satisfy the project needs.***

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Q: Does PA-5 reduce truck traffic in the Village of Constantine?

A: *PA-5 would reduce all through traffic in the Village of Constantine because the by-pass would be a faster route without traffic signals.*

Q: What are the traffic counts in Constantine?

A: *The following shows average daily counts at the village limits of Constantine.*

Location on US-131	Year 2000 Daily Counts	2000 Peak Hour Counts
Between Stears Rd. & Canaris St. (Constantine Southern Limit)	13,100	1,179
0.2 Miles NE of Spring St. (Constantine Northern Limit)	12,500	1,125

Other Stakeholders Comments

1. A Tee-Intersection at the south Junction of M-60 does not lend itself towards non-motorized facilities safety.
2. PA-5 does not solve the region’s existing economic development problems.
3. Traffic continuity should be maintained wherever possible.
4. The rerouting of Young’s Prairie traffic could be confusing. Suggestions were made to construct an overpass to allow direct access to Constantine.
5. A concern was expressed that PA-5 would not facilitate economic development on US-131.
6. A limited access highway is needed to secure future economic development for the region.
7. MDOT is wasting money evaluating PA-5.
8. Traffic problems in the Village of Schoolcraft are not being addressed in this study.
9. MDOT should evaluate the possibility of using County Route 17 as the bypass.
10. A freeway is needed from the Indiana state line up to Kalamazoo.
11. Crash statistics should be provided to members of the Stakeholders’ Committee.